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Reducing Risk for YMCAs

Avoiding Vehicle Accidents

Many YMCAs rely on transportation to support their program and outreach efforts. Transporting passengers is risky business. Here are some ways to enhance your current transportation policies and make your Y's drivers, vehicles and passengers safer.

Training and Alertness Are the Keys to Safety

Driver training is a key need for YMCA employees and volunteers so they learn the unique hazards associated with transporting program participants.

YMCAs should review their driver-training program and emphasize the need for safe driving practices, such as speed control, focus and vehicle handling. The training should include safety rules, work procedures and identifying potential hazards on a driver's routes.

Most vehicle accidents are preventable—backing into other vehicles, hitting parked cars, rear-ending other vehicles and hitting posts.

Driver inattention or failure to obey safety regulations are leading causes of Y accidents.

Training tip: Spend some time discussing left turns across traffic, typically confronted at intersections and driveway entrances. These are common accident locations and occur when the driver's speed entering the intersection was too fast. Don't forget about parking lots and backing up, two other frequent accident situations.

Driver Supervision Is Important

Y drivers benefit from a high standard of supervision. All drivers should adhere to the YMCA's safety standards and be held accountable for violations.

Job descriptions should include the position's safety requirements and performance standards. These standards should be measurable, appropriate to the driver's level of responsibility and included in the driver's performance evaluation.

Supervisors should periodically follow drivers to observe their driving behavior and practices. A system of progressive discipline—verbal warnings, a written warning, suspension and, if necessary, termination—should be in place and enforced to ensure passenger safety.

Ys should also have a recognition system that identifies and rewards staff members who adhere to correct procedures, and whose contributions improve the YMCA's policies, procedures and safety record.

Reducing the Risks

- Road-test drivers frequently — they'll appreciate the attention.
- Conduct daily documented inspections of vehicles.
- Maintain vehicles and document all repairs.
- Buy high-quality tires and keep them inflated to the manufacturer's recommendations.
- Fill the front seats first.
- Comply with all vehicular regulations, laws and speed limits.
- Obtain and review annual motor vehicle reports for all drivers.
- Hire drivers who are over the age of 25 when possible. (According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), drivers under the age of 25 have the highest rate of involvement in fatal crashes of any age group.)
- Use only experienced, well-rested, commercially licensed drivers when chartering buses.
- Train drivers at the time of hire and offer annual/seasonal defensive driver training (online is good).
- Insist that all occupants wear seat belts at all times.
- Monitor weather conditions and be prepared.
- Do not overload vehicles with people or luggage.
- On long trips, stop to rest at least once every two hours; alternate drivers so they are fresh.
- Reduce or eliminate driving at night.
- Review emergency procedures regularly.
- Ensure that drivers never text or make phone calls while driving.
- Err on the side of caution when driving.

Do You Still Use 15-Passenger Vans?

The NHTSA issued a warning about rollover potential for 15-passenger vans. It is important to remove these vehicles from your fleet for passenger use in the near future. However, some Ys have yet to complete this transition and must look to manage this risk appropriately.

The additional weight of passengers and equipment causes the van's center of gravity to shift back and up. This change increases the risk of rollover, especially if the driver is forced to perform panic maneuvers in an emergency. NHTSA research has shown that 15-passenger vans have a rollover risk that increases dramatically as the number of occupants increases from fewer than five to more than 10. In fact, 15-passenger vans (with 10 or more occupants) had a rollover rate in single-vehicle crashes that is nearly three times the rate of those that were lightly loaded.

If you use these vehicles for transporting passengers, you should not have more than 10 occupants, seat people near the front, maintain proper tire pressures, reduce speeds to below 45 mph, train drivers on vehicle characteristics and refrain from excessive equipment portage (especially on roofs).

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